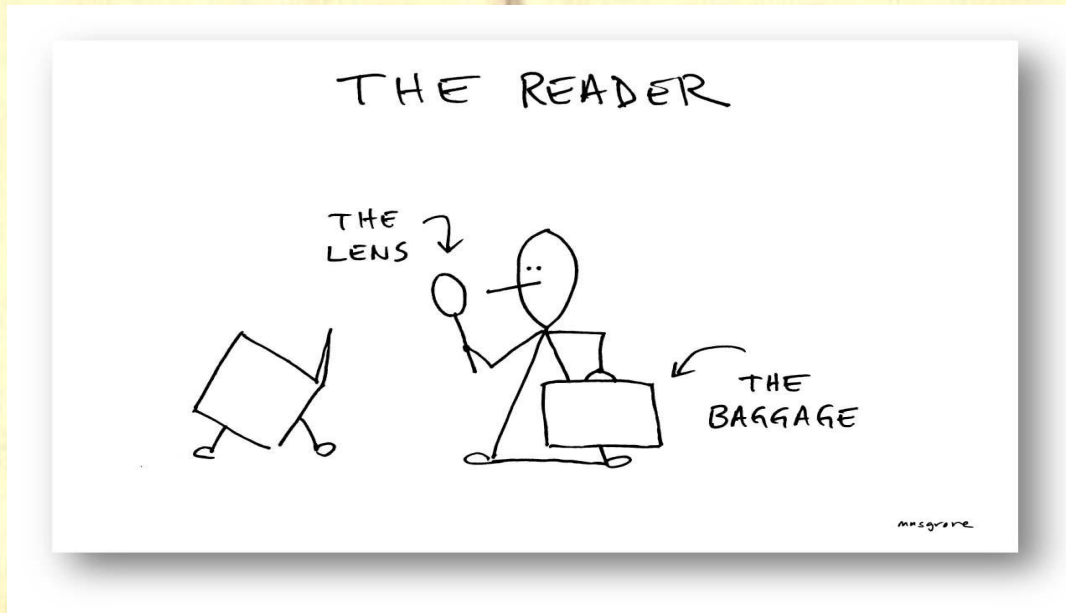


Critical Approaches to Literature

AP Literature & Composition
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What do we mean by “critical approaches”?

Critical approaches, sometimes called *lenses*, are different perspectives we can consider when looking at a piece or several pieces of Literature.

Their purpose to help us answer the following questions, as well as helping us interpret and understand literary works:

1. What do we read?
2. Why do we read?
3. How do we read?

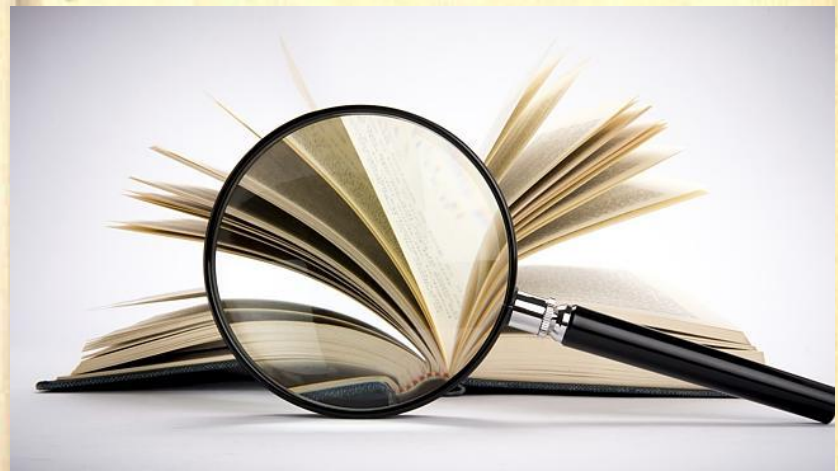


Important Critical Approaches

1. Formalist Criticism
2. Biographical Criticism
3. Mythological Criticism
4. New Historicist Criticism
5. Psychological/Psychoanalytic Criticism
6. Deconstructionist Criticism
7. Reader-Response Criticism
8. Sociological Criticism
 - a. Marxist Criticism
 - b. Feminist Criticism
9. Gender Criticism
10. Postcolonial Criticism

Some Things to Think About in Regards to Each Theory

- ★ What are the limits/benefits of each form of criticism?
- ★ Is there a "right" or "wrong" form?
- ★ Are some forms more "correct" than others?
- ★ Can a mode of criticism alter the entire meaning of a text?



1. Formalist Criticism

- **Formalist criticism** emphasizes the form of a literary work to determine its meaning, focusing on literary elements and how they work to create meaning.
 - A text is a completely separate and individual entity.
 - Examine texts out of the context of their time period, social setting, and author's background.
 - Employs close readings of texts and analysis of the *effects* of literary elements and techniques on the text.

1. Formalist Criticism

Two Major Tenets of Formalism

1. Literary texts have "fixed meanings." This means they exist independent of any particular reader or context.
2. The greatest literary texts are "timeless" and "universal."

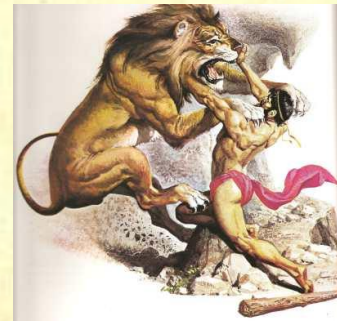


2. Biographical Criticism

- **Biographical criticism** emphasizes the importance of the author's life and background into account when analyzing a text.
 - Three tenets of biographical criticism:
 - Understanding an author's background can help readers interpret a text.
 - Understanding an author's difficulties in creating that text can help readers appreciate a text.
 - Studying the way authors apply and modify their own life experiences in their works can help readers understand the author.

3. Mythological Criticism

- The title is misleading...this is not about mythology.
- **Mythological criticism** examines the "universal" elements of human life as they occur across cultures.
 - Major Tenet of Mythological criticism
 - Archetypes are central to this form. Archetypes are the universal elements occurring in literary works from all over the world.



4. New Historicist (or Historical) Criticism

➤ **New historicist (or historical) criticism** posits that every literary work is the product of its time and its world.

○ Two tenets of New historicist criticism:

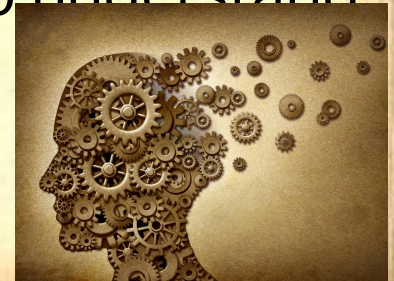
■ Gives appropriate background information to help readers understand how text were perceived in their time.

■ Examines how literary texts reflect the ideas, beliefs, and attitudes of the time in which they were created.



5. Psychological/Psychoanalytic Criticism

- **Psychological/Psychoanalytic criticism** is based on the work of Sigmund Freud. The text is seen as a reflection of the author's mind and personality.
 - Two tenets of psychological/psychoanalytic criticism:
 - Views characters in Literature as a reflection of the author her/himself
 - Uses in-depth character analysis to understand ulterior motives of the characters.



6. Deconstructionist Criticism

- **Deconstructionist criticism** argues that because there is no single meaning of any word, there is no single meaning of any text. ALL texts have multiple, valid meanings because readers will interpret words differently than the writer intended them.
 - Two tenets of deconstructionist criticism:
 - MOST literary criticism focuses on the *construction* of a larger meaning from the text, but deconstructionist criticism focuses on the *DECONSTRUCTION* (or tearing down) of any meaning within a text by a variety of readers.
 - Everything and anything can be relative to YOU.

7. Reader-Response Criticism

- **Reader-response criticism** argues that the meaning of a text is dependent upon the reader's response to it.
 - Focuses on the act of reading and how it affects readers' perceptions of a text
 - Text as an EXPERIENCE, not an object.
 - The text is a living thing that exists in the reader's imagination

Basically,

READER + READING SITUATION + TEXT = MEANING

7. Reader-Response Criticism

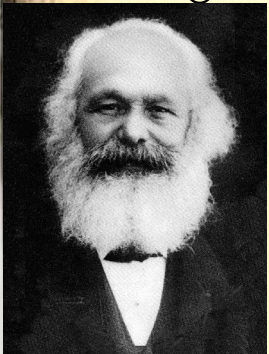
- Two tenets of reader-response criticism
 - A person's interpretation will likely change over time, as they have more and more experiences to bring with them to the text.
 - Readers from different periods of time, different cultures, and different places will have different interpretations of the same text.

8. Sociological Criticism

- **Sociological criticism** argues that social contexts must be taken into consideration when analyzing a text.
 - Focuses on the beliefs and values of a society and how they are reflected in a text
 - Focuses on economic, political, and cultural issues within a literary text
 - Most important tenet:
 - Literature is a reflection of the society that created it.

8a. Marxist Criticism

- **Marxist criticism** focuses on (you guessed it...) economic and social conditions and is based in the political theory of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels.
 - It focuses understanding how power, politics, and money play a role in literary texts and amongst literary societies and characters
 - Two most important focuses of Marxist criticism:
 - The ways in which dominant groups (or majority groups) exploit those deemed as subordinate (or minority groups)
 - The ways in which people are alienated from one another because of power, money, and politics



8b. Feminist Criticism

- Feminist criticism focuses on the roles, positions, and influences of women within literary texts.
 - Focuses on the ways female consciousness is written by both female and male authors.
 - Three tenets of feminist criticism:
 - Western civilization is patriarchal.
 - Patriarchal ideals pervade Literature.
 - Most Literature throughout time has been gender-biased (because most lasting Literature has been written by men).



9. Gender Criticism (Queer Theory)

- **Gender criticism and queer theory** analyze literature through the lens of socially-constructed gender roles.
- Gender criticism and queer theory also analyzes the influence and representation of sexuality (mainly, "queer sexualities") within a literary text.
 - Two tenets of gender criticism and queer theory:
 - The concepts of gender and gender roles are ideals created by patriarchal societies.
 - Because queer sexualities were largely suppressed by Western society for so long, the appearances and influences of queer sexualities within a literary text are often subversive.

10. Postcolonial Criticism

- **Postcolonial criticism** is a new and emerging type of literary criticism. It is a type of cultural criticism that focuses on literary texts produced in places that were, at one time, under the influence of European (read: white) colonial rule.
 - Basic tenets of postcolonial criticism:
 - Seeks to break down the false images and myths that the Western (read: white) world has created about the non-Western world.
 - Colonization is both violent and destructive by nature, which informs and influences the production of art in non-Western, colonized cultures.

AP Literature Key Terms Assignment

- ❑ Your assignment:
 - ❑ Research and define each of the key terms on the AP Literature Key Terms list.
 - ❑ Create notecards for each term.
 - ❑ The notecards should include the following:
 - ❑ the key term
 - ❑ the definition of the key term
 - ❑ a space for an example to be added
- ❑ This will be due in class on 9/9 (next week).